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CHAPTER II

History, Geography and Ecology

1. Some historical observations on Ching Ho Town.

The history of Ching Ho as an important market town dates back about fifty years only. There is no written material regarding the town, or even of the county in which it is situated. In *Shuen Tien Fu Chi* (順天府誌) and *Je Fu Tung Chi* (畿輔通志), the two most important works dealing with the history and geography of the neighbourhood of Peping the name of Ching Ho is not even mentioned. The former monograph was completed in 1885 and the latter was first compiled about two hundred years ago and revised in 1884, This would lead us to believe that the town of Ching Ho did not occupy an important position in the 1880's. However, the Ching Ho river received a considerable amount of careful and laborious attention from the writers of these books, and there are many references to it in the text and footnotes. The Ching Ho camp was also mentioned, and marked on the map at a spot about five miles east of the site of the present town of Ching Ho.

From what we can gather from the literary works and from the old inhabitants of Ching Ho we con safely say that Ching Ho has a history of about fifty years as an important market town. Some fifty years ago

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174 there were only about twenty moderate sized shops which served as resting places for travellers to and from the northwest of China. There was also a royal granary of considerable importance on the south-eastern border of Ching Ho at a distance of of about one *li* where a large amount of foodstuffs collected from the Southern provinces of the Empire, and transported north by way of the Grand Canal and Tungchow, were stored. Around the granary lived a large number of guards and carriers who were the regular customers of the small shops in Ching Ho.

443 Some time during the closing years of the last
174 century—a date which we have not been able to ascertain definitely—a system was established for the exchange of grain. Before that time the farmers of the district northwest of Peping often marketed their grain at the Pinghsifu (平西府) market or the Sha-ho (沙河) market. But owing to its proximity to Peping and its strategic position on the great northwestern highway Ching Ho has rapidly developed into one of most important market towns in the northwestern area of Hopei (Chihli) Province. At the time of the Boxer Rebellion Ching Ho was already notable as a market town, and the temporary foreign rulers in Peping even sent agents to help maintain the market in a peaceful and orderly state.

438 Later, during the closing years of the Tsing
174 Dynasty the town grew rapidly on account of the establishment of a number of government institutions, a military academy, a military factory and an aerodrome all in the west of the town. Ching Ho became not only the first grain market in the northwestern

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area of Hopei Province, but also a very large market 438
for the distribution of manufactured commodities to 174
the neighbouring farmers and the government em-
ployees. Towards the end of the Tsing Dynasty a [497]
railway was built connecting Peping with Kalgan
direct. Although there is a station at Ching Ho it is
some distance from the town. It is more convenient
for farmers to transport their grain and agricultural
produce directly through to Peping by the railway
than to stop at Ching Ho to market it there. Con-
sequently the grain market at West Gate of Peping
(Hsichihmen) is competing with Ching Ho, and is
threatening to take its place as the most important
grain market in this district. Some time after the [464]
revolution all the government institutions, such as
the military academy, the military factory and the
acrodrome have been suspended owing to political
disturbances, and a large number of people have been
thrown out of employment. But the disadvantages
through political disburbances have been in some
measure offset by the fact that communications by
railway were also upset, and so grain passing
through on old highway has given Ching Ho a tem-
porary opportunity of reviving its ealier prestige.
When the political situation improves it is confidently
expected that both the government institutions and
the railway will resume, and that although the posi-
tion of Ching Ho as the primary grain collecting
centre of the northwestern area will probably be im-
paired, yer its position as a distributinn centre for the
surrounding neighbourl.ood, and for the goverinment
institutions, will be strengthened.